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Women helping women

Jewish Women's Foundation of Greater Pittsburgh partners with U.S., Israel Women's Foundations to promote gender equality

Recent acts of illegal exclusion and discrimination against women in Israel have spurred an international movement and a unique collaboration of individual Jewish women's groups.

For the first time, Jewish women's foundations – 14 in the United States including **the Jewish Women's Foundation of Greater Pittsburgh**, and three in Israel – are pooling resources to effect social change for women and girls in Israel. The Jewish Women's Collaborative International Fund has awarded a two-year, \$150,000 grant to *Itach-Maaki*, lead organization of *Bringing Women to the Fore: A Feminist Partnership*. The partnership is a cooperative effort of eight leading women's organizations in Israel that are uniting to develop a strong activist coalition.

The groundbreaking collaboration became possible with the support of Barbara Dobkin, a pre-eminent feminist funder both in the United States and in Israel. Her interest and financial commitment brought the independent foundations together annually for the past 10 years to discuss issues and share ideas.

“After a decade of supporting the growth of the Jewish women's funds and urging them to think of themselves as movement builders, I am thrilled that 17 of the funds have collaborated on investing in Israeli women's leadership,” Dobkin said. “Many funders pay lip service to

collaborative grant-making, but this type of sweeping collaboration is unprecedented in American Jewish life.”

Judy Greenwald Cohen, Executive Director of the Jewish Women’s Foundation of Greater Pittsburgh, said members of her organization are pleased to be part of this important, international effort to improve Jewish women’s lives in Israel. “The project is a direct reflection of our organization’s core values and demonstrates the power of women’s collective voices,” she said.

Jennifer Elvey Schnepfer, Assistant Director, Jewish Women’s Foundation of Metropolitan Chicago and Rebecca Garrison, Associate Director, Jewish Women’s Foundation of New York, co-lead the collaborative. In March 2011, they volunteered to develop the process that made it possible for such a large number of Jewish women’s organizations to work together.

“We thought it would be an achievement if four or five Jewish Women’s Foundations participated in a collaborative grant,” Schnepfer said. “Our hope and expectations more than tripled as Foundations from around the country and Israel pledged their involvement.”

The mission of the Jewish Women’s Collaborative International Fund is to raise awareness about important concerns affecting women and girls in the Jewish and broader Israeli community, such as gender disenfranchisement and discrimination. When a young Orthodox schoolgirl in the city of Bet Shemesh was harassed and intimidated by a group of extremists in January, the incident served as a catalyst for media coverage of these issues, spotlighting the involuntary segregation of men and women in some public places. Such incidents took place although major rabbinic leaders condemned this practice and the Israeli Supreme Court outlawed it. Another concern brought to the forefront was the plight of Jewish women whose husbands refuse to give them a *get* – a Jewish divorce.

“While we were initially considering a variety of other grant themes, we were outraged by the recent news and wanted to demonstrate our support for women in Israel by targeting this issue in a strategic and tangible way,” Garrison said.

Awarding funds to Israeli organizations to address an issue in Israel is not new to the Jewish community – but collaborating on a solution is.

“People have come together to talk about issues, but they haven’t funded an effort collaboratively,” Schnepfer said. “We’re shedding light on current, pressing women’s issues. We’re putting our money toward what we believe in – creating much-needed social change.”

The Feminist Partnership will use the grant to promote gender equality and women's rights and to minimize gender gaps on a variety of issues in Israel through large-scale social and media campaigns. This Israeli coalition aspires to lead effective change in social perception and public policy, to promote equality and reduce gender gaps in the economic, social and occupational spheres – making Israel a more gender-equal society. Participating organizations include: Itach-Maaki: Women Lawyers for Social Justice, Adva Center, The Israel Women's Network (IWN), Economic Empowerment for Women (EEW), Achoti (Sister) for Women in Israel, Mahut Center, Supportive Community – Women's Business Development Center, and Women's Spirit – Financial Independence for Women Victims of Violence.

Garrison said, "Now that we have a model process in place, it will be easier to take on this initiative again... I am excited for the future of the collaborative."

Dobkin said, "I am proud to have played a small part in this momentous work. And of course, I am not one bit surprised that women made it happen."

For more than 15 years, Jewish women's foundations across the United States have been reshaping the face of Jewish philanthropy. Through their giving circle model, the foundations offer women a hands-on, collaborative and democratic philanthropic experience, one that provides members with a seat at the table, a place to be heard, to learn, to connect and to effect change.

JWCIF includes the following member organizations: Boston Jewish Community Women's Fund, Jewish Women's Foundation of Broward County, Jewish Women's Foundation of Greater Pittsburgh, Jewish Women's Foundation of Metropolitan Chicago, Jewish Women's Foundation of Metropolitan Detroit, Jewish Women's Foundation of New York, Jewish Women's Foundation of South Palm Beach County, Jewish Women's Foundation of the Greater Palm Beaches, Israel Lions of Judah, National Council of Jewish Women Israel Granting Program, The Dafna Fund, The Hadassah Foundation, The Neditot and Neshamot Funds of UJA-Federation/Westchester Women's Venture Fund, Tikkun Olam Women's Foundation of Greater Washington, Women of Vision – The Jewish Women's Foundation of Greater Philadelphia, and Women's Amutot Initiative of the Greater Miami Jewish Federation.

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